

Depression or determination?

written by David M. Weinberg | 02.05.2025

As I walked this week through the endlessly chilling rows of fallen soldiers in Jerusalem's Mount Herzl Military Cemetery, two narratives about Israel went to war in my head.

One was a dangerously debilitating discourse of depression, desperation, and decay. A defeatist and poisonous exposition, predominant in some media, on the supposed moral bankruptcy of the Israeli government and half the Israeli nation. This is because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his backers will not unconditionally bow before Hamas for the release of Israel's remaining hostages in Gaza.

The other storyline is a tale of defiance, determination, and destiny. It is an optimistic and far-seeing discourse on the legitimacy, necessity, and sure-to-yet-succeed heroic battle against Israel's enemies like Hamas and Iran, despite the depleting debate over hostages and battle priorities.

My eyes are wide open, and I am well aware of the mistakes made in Jerusalem. But I reject the narrative of government evil and Israeli decline.

I refuse to embrace the radical Left's assertion of Israel's unworthiness. I hate and reject its "torch dousing" instead of "torch lighting" ceremonies on Independence Day. I cannot stomach its desecration of Remembrance Day ceremonies with rhetorically violent protest.

Instead, I prefer to embrace a plot of purpose and an inevitable, righteous movement toward stability and peace.

Indeed, polls published this week about this country's state-of-mind clearly show that most Israelis reject the negativism and angry bombast of radical actors, even if many of us are hurting and restless.

Israelis, I think, prefer to mark this complex memorial/holiday weekend in appreciation of Israel's survival and achievements, and with prayer that brotherhood, tenacity, and better leadership will see the country through to remarkable success.

I SENSE that as beleaguered and critical of their decision-makers they may be, Israelis also are steadfast in seeking triumph. Hatikvah, the hope, has not been extinguished. Israelis can and certainly will drive beyond the current straits, repairing their internal ills and strengthening their strategic posture.

So much magnificent motivating music comes from the speeches given by bereaved mothers and fathers at Remembrance Day and Independence Day ceremonies. Some of these texts are epistles left behind by fallen soldiers, expressing absolute faith in the wellsprings of age-old Jewish identity and the future of the State of Israel; letters that exhorted their families to stay the course and celebrate life.

Others, like the inspiring speech delivered last year by Rabbi Menahem Kalmanson at the Israel Prize award ceremony, are based on a deep dive into brotherhood, a renewed commitment to national solidarity, and love of peoplehood.

Israelis withstand the storm

Another set of apt notes dominating Independence Day discourse is defiance; defiance of the pro-Hamas messaging and anti-Zionist assaults that have taken root in capitals and campuses around the world.

Israelis are determined to withstand ugly narratives of delegitimization that are crashing like tidal waves, and the resultant international dictates meant to weaken the Jewish state.

They are resolute in rebuffing the soft bigotry of low expectations from Palestinians, which is the counterpart of hard bigotry – impossible demands – made on Israel.

They repudiate the arrogant talk in Western capitals of unilaterally recognizing Palestinian statehood and anointing the decrepit Palestinian Authority as a stabilizing force in Gaza. They also reject erroneous strategic thinking that sees another soft deal with Iran as the panacea for all regional ills.

At this moment, real independence means that Israel must flout those who seek to emasculate it (deny it weapons), those who would prevent Israel from achieving its necessary and justified war goals of crushing Hamas and Hezbollah,

countering Iran, and restoring this country's deterrent power.

As Prof. Gil Troy has written: "On Israel Independence Day, we must negate the misleading, Palestinian-centered tale of woe, and return to the magnificent Jewish story and the Zionist tale of redemption... Our enemies want to make us miserable, to make Israel unlivable, to make Independence Day uncelebrate-able. We cannot allow that to happen.

"We cannot afford to mourn or mope. We must live the miracle of Israel: freedom, prosperity, dignity, and power... while rejecting the poisoned ivy of the Ivy Leagues... and we must broadcast our narrative and affirm our rights loudly and proudly, effectively, and creatively."

I SENSE that there is another level of motivation that grips and sustains most Israelis, and this stems from the realm of faith, from the capacity to discern grand historical movement beyond momentary difficulty.

Ambassador Dr. Ya'acov Herzog (1921-1972; uncle of Israel's current President Isaac Herzog) wrote that "Israel is mystic movement, a divine drama, a saga of metaphysical union spanning centuries between a people, their God, and a land.

"It is the celebration of a nation that, at the moment of ultimate nadir, of devastating Holocaust, rose from the ashes, armed with little more than conviction and a historical consciousness that promised renewal, to stake claim to their ancestry.

"Israel represents a vindication of faith and prayer through the ages. It is a symbol of revival, a message of hope, lasting evidence of the integrity of the spirit. It is redemption, providential consolation."

Indeed, there is power in Jewish history that explains much about Israel today: About the Jewish people's against-all-odds return to the Land of Israel after 2,000 years; about its willingness to sacrifice so much for independence; about its sometimes-stubborn refusal to accept rational calculations of diplomatic cost and benefit.

And so, Israelis plow forward while shaking off bleak prognostications impressed upon it (often impolitely) by allies. In fact, those who consider history only in terms of national politics and international relations underestimate or misjudge

Israel.

They fail to understand that Israel is guided by an astral calculus that is not always perceptible; by a deep sense of Jewish historical mission that blurs the lines between imagination and reality, between the possible and the feasible. They fail to appreciate how committed Israelis are to victory.

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